

**Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture*
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MICHAEL J. SULLIVAN

When Merlin falls prey to Vivien's enchanting songs in *Idylls of the King*, infatuation leads to entrapment, and the power of song within the poem darkens. It is at this point in *Merlin and Vivien* that Tennyson likens rhyme to relics:

this rhyme
Is like the fair pearl-necklace of the Queen,
That burst in dancing, and the pearls were split;
Some lost, some stolen, some as relics kept. [...]
It lives dispersedly in many hands,
And every minstrel sings it differently (ll. 448-451, 455-456)

The common thread that binds together the pearls of bardic matter is snapped, and alongside the variants and verses that scatter, some are venerated, as akin to relics. Such links between relics and verse are the subject of Deborah Lutz's well-researched monograph, which performs a literary-cultural study of mourning in the nineteenth century. Tennyson, naturally, features prominently, though Lutz limits her analysis to *In Memoriam* and shorter elegies, alongside chapters on Keats, D. G. Rossetti, Emily Brontë, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy. Her focus throughout is on relics as 'lyrical matter' (1), a phrase which puns on the book's conceptual origins in the recent wave of cultural and material analysis. Lutz invokes 'Thing theory' (3), and terms such as 'thingification' (10), to examine how the dead body, devoid of consciousness, returns to the state of an object: an object that can trigger memories, like an elegy or epitaph.

The volume's chapter on Tennyson draws extensively on the similarities between religious shrines, secular relics and elegy in Victorian England. For Lutz, *In Memoriam* represents a 'reliquary – a *Wunderkammer*, house museum, collection' – which contains 'the many relic-like smaller poems or "poem objects"' (114-115). Her analysis of the work is largely indebted to the illuminating and sustained readings of loss contributed to Tennyson studies by Christopher Ricks, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, Eric Griffiths, Seamus Perry and Peter Sacks. Lutz's aim, however, seems less to offer a new reading of the poem than to reconnect the efforts of elegy to Victorian 'death culture'. She emphasises, in her afterword, how the rise of photography competed with relics to sustain memories of loved ones, even though photography could not provide the direct link to the body offered by a lock of hair. *In Memoriam*, we might add, is neither simply a shrine to Hallam's body nor an image of the man; its metaphors apprehend the emptiness and presence of death, the doubt, faith, music and silence that make the poem many 'things' at once. Speaking figuratively of *In Memoriam* is fitting, since so much of its language is an attempt to find approximations for feelings that stir beneath or beyond its verse. While the book relies heavily on the critic's own similes to locate the poem in its cultural context, Lutz's study invites us to re-consider the centrality of grief and the persistence of mourning across nineteenth-century art and literature.

Michael J. Sullivan
Trinity College, Cambridge